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S E R M O N

Preached at the PARISH CHURCH of  
St. JAMES, WESTMINSTER,

ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 1756.

Being the Day appointed by his MAJESTY for

A GENERAL FAST,

ON OCCASION of the late

EARTHQUAKES,

AND THE

Present Situation of PUBLIC AFFAIRS.

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By CHARLES MOSS, D.D.

Rector of St. JAMES's, WESTMINSTER.

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L O N D O N :

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St. James, Westminster

On ...  
Being the ...

A GENERAL

On Occasion of ...  
FARTHOUS



By CHARLES ...  
Rector of St. James, Westminster

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and R. ...  
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## ISAIAH xxvi. 9.

*When thy Judgments are in the Earth, the  
Inhabitants of the World will learn Right-  
eousness.*

**T**HE Prophet's Observation is founded on a perfect Acquaintance with the History, and an intimate Knowledge of the Spirit and Temper of his Countrymen. The Blessings they enjoyed were not always accompanied with a thankful Heart. They considered them as a Kind of Right, in consequence of God's Promises to their Forefathers; and were apt to overlook the bountiful Hand, through which they were freely given. Their Power and Plenty were applied to the Gratification of their Lusts, and not to the Honour and Service of God. The Lewdness and Licence, that attended the religious Solemnities of their Neighbours, were more to their Taste, than the Chastity and Decency of their own Worship. Hence they fell easily into the Idolatries and Superstitions

of the Heathen, and filled the Land with Abominations.

But if Ease and Plenty made them licentious and wanton, Affliction and Distress could subdue and humble them. When the Hand of God lay heavy on them, and his Judgments were at their Doors, their Souls were filled with Compunction and Sorrow. They drew near to the Lord with the same Zeal with which they had fled from him, and returned into the Way of his Commandments. Examine their History from their Exit out of *Egypt* down to the *Babylonish* Captivity, and you will find that this was the general Tenor of their Conduct. Prosperity and Corruption, Distress and Piety, produced and followed each other in alternate Succession.

The People of God were cast in the same Mould, and had the same Powers and Passions, as the rest of Mankind; and in this Picture of the *Israelites*, I have given you a true Picture of Man. Prosperity is apt to make him thoughtless, presumptuous, and wanton; he grows secure in his own imagined Strength, and lives in a Kind of Independence on Providence. But if Adversity touches him; if the Wrath of Heaven is let loose upon him, in Famine or Pestilence, or any other extraordinary Calamity, he is soon made sensible of his Weakness. He is ready to look up to that Power,  
which



which alone can support and save him; and whilst his Judgments are in the Earth will learn Righteousness.

If we look at Home, we shall see these Reflections sadly verified. The Generations past would furnish many Examples: But there is little need of going far back, since a few Years will be sufficient for the Purpose.

Whilst we were lately pressed with the Calamities of War; when Rebellion advanced with fierce Countenance, and pointed even to the Capital; though some appeared to have no Feeling of the Danger, yet the Hearts of many began to faint. Willing to secure a Friend in case of Extremity, they called upon the Lord for Help, and his Temples were filled with Votaries. But when the Danger was blown over, the Impressions it occasioned were soon worn out. Peace brought with it Security both within and without. The Fear of the Lord vanished with the Fear of Man; and Religion gave Place to Vice and to Vanity.

But this State of Forgetfulness and Dissipation lasted not long. A little Time brought fresh Alarms, in a Form that was yet more dreadful; when the Lord arose to shake terribly the Earth, and the Foundations of this proud City trembled before him. Those who were not lost to all Sense of Religion took the Alarm in good earnest,

earnest, and pursued the Measures that Reason and Religion dictated. All was Humiliation, Piety, and Devotion. The House of God was crowded with Suppliants to deprecate his Wrath; his Altars were surrounded with true Penitents, and Religion wore a Face of Seriousness and Solemnity. How long this lasted, every one here present will easily recollect. In the Hearts of a few perhaps, and I fear it is but very few, the good Effects of it may still remain. But with the Generality of the People it was much otherwise. Scenes of Terror and of Piety, were soon succeeded by Scenes of Pleasure, of Madness and Folly; and the World grew as vain, as wanton, and as wicked as ever.

But this temporary Contrition, in Times of Calamity, and this sudden Transition to the other Extreme, when the Scene changes, will not avail us for ever. A similar Conduct in the Jewish Nation, after all the Calamities of War, ended in their Captivity and total Dispersion. And God knows how soon it may bring us to the same End or a worse. God, in his Mercy, bore with them for many Ages, and he has born with us. His Patience and Forbearance have their Bounds; and it is well worth considering, whether we are not drawing near to the utmost Limits of them. Public Calamity and Distress are authoritative Warnings of our Danger, and calls upon us to repent and amend our Lives; and whether they be  
natural



natural or judicial, were intended by Providence for that End.

Let us then look round us, and attend to the Alarms we have lately received, and the providential Warnings that still hang over us. We have just seen the Judgments of God, in the most alarming and dreadful Form, fall on a neighbouring opulent and flourishing Kingdom; and its Capital, long famous for its Riches, Magnificence and Splendor, involved in one dismal Ruin. And such is the Disorder, into which the Powers of Nature are fallen, that the Earth seems not yet to have recovered its natural Stability.

When a Neighbour's House is in Flames, proverbial Prudence teaches us to regard our own. But our Concern, in this Case, is yet nearer: To the People, where these Judgments fell, we are united in the strictest Tyes of Friendship and Commerce; and in that View, we are Fellow-sufferers with them, and Sharers in the common Calamity.

And though the Earth, in this Island, was not sensibly shaken, yet another Element was thrown, in many Parts of it, into unusual and frightful Agitations. And let us remember, that the same Power which disturbed the Waters, is able to disturb the Earth also; and

and that he who has made of one fenced City a ruinous Heap, can, at his Will, bring another and a greater, to the same dreadful and calamitous End.

Though God was pleased to pour the Heaviest of his Judgments on one Kingdom; yet many others had a large Share of them. And though the utmost Extent of this alarming Stroke has not been duly traced, and probably never can be; yet we are sure it extended through a great Part of the known World. A lively and affecting Proof, to those who want to be convinced or awakened, that God's Arm is not shortened; and that he is able, in an instant, to carry Destruction to every Part of the Globe, and to join the most distant People in one common Ruin.

But you will say perhaps (for it is the Language now in fashion) that such Events are owing altogether to *natural Causes*; by which doubtless you would intimate, that Providence has no hand in them, and consequently that Man has little cause to concern himself about them. I shall not dispute your Right to use the Language that best pleases you. But what will you gain by it? Consider, that *natural Causes*, acting with due Force, may be too hard for you. Your Neighbours stand a living and melancholy Proof of it; God, in his Mercy, grant that your turn be not the next! But if this should happen to be your Fate, to be plunged into another world,



by an instantaneous Shock, with all your Sins about you, it will impart you but little, whether the Cause be natural or supernatural.

But, after all, they who are fond of this Language would do well to examine themselves, whether they understand rightly, what *natural Causes* mean. In the Minds of many that use it, I doubt whether it has a distinct meaning; and in some I suspect it has no meaning at all.

Matter has no active Principle, or *cause*, originally inherent in it; and natural causes, as they exist in Matter, are strictly speaking Effects only. They are nothing more than Impressions on it by the Hand of the Creator, and are continued and maintained by his immediate and constant Agency. Gravity is a mighty Agent in our own World, and the visible System around us: If you could discover some immediate and mechanical Cause of Gravity, you would find that there is another Cause that lies still behind; and the Enquiry must, in the End, terminate in the first Mover and intelligent Cause of all Things. So that Gravity, notwithstanding the mighty Effects it produces, is itself strictly speaking merely an Effect, constantly produced and supported by the immediate Hand of God. And the same is true also of every other active Principle we observe in Matter. For this, I appeal to the best Philosophy that ever was known to the World,

and to the best Philosophers, both of the present Age and the past. He therefore that ascribes any given Event to natural Causes, if he understands his own Language, is so far from excluding Providence from having a share in it, that he supposes it in the strongest Manner. And thus true Philosophy and true Religion teach one and the same Doctrine, that whether a Kingdom, a City, or even a Sparrow falleth, it is not without our Father which is in Heaven.

But farther. As natural Causes are under the immediate Hand of God, he can set them to work, when and where he thinks proper; he can direct them to any Object, and adapt them to any End, that his Wisdom thinks fit to accomplish. His Powers lye hid, and his Trains are laid in every Part of Nature; in the Air, in the Waters, and in the Earth; and he can call them forth, at any Time, and give them Activity, in the Shape of natural Cause and Effect, to perform his Pleasure, and execute his Vengeance. He can employ the Power and Ambition of one Nation to correct the Insolence, and punish the Profligacy of another. He can chastise the Wickedness of one Prince, by the Sword of another that is more wicked than himself; and can humble him also in his Turn, by Plague or Pestilence, or any other Instrument of his Wrath or Justice. He that attends to what passes in the World, and considers the Nature of God and of Man, will see that such Things are likely



to happen; and he that reads the History of Providence, as it lays in the Scriptures, will find that such Things have constantly happened, in all Ages of the World. And the same Events may come to pass again and again, by the same Means; and yet to the Eye of Man they shall seem to differ nothing from the casual Operation of mere natural Causes.

Had you seen the Story of *St. Paul's Shipwreck* in a common History, it had doubtless appeared to you something wonderful and uncommon. But still possibly you might have discovered nothing in it, beyond the Reach of natural Causes. A lucky Chance perhaps, you would have said, presented to each of the poor Wretches a fortunate Plank, and a favourable Movement of the Waters carried him safe to Land. But take it, as it lyes explained in the sacred History, and you will see, that the Hand of God was in it: He had a chosen Vessel on Board, deputed to execute a chosen Commission; and though the Wind and the Waves were mighty, yet the Purpose of God was not to be defeated: He saved his favoured Minister from the Ruin that seemed to threaten him, and shewed Mercy to the rest, for his Sake.

That a particular Providence attends both Individuals and public States, is a Point in which all Religions are agreed, whether Pagan, Jewish, or Christian. But

it is so usual with Providence to apply natural Causes, as they are called, to the Accomplishment of his hidden Purposes, that the Sagacity of Man is but seldom able to discern, when an Event is the Production of natural Causes, and when it is strictly miraculous, and owing to a special Designation of Providence. An unanswerable Reason this, why we should be candid in judging the Cause of those, who suffer by signal Calamities; and an Argument, at the same Time, for considering all such Calamities, whether public or private, whether they fall immediately on ourselves or others, as providential Warnings of our Danger, and Calls to Repentance. They speak the Language, which our Lord spoke to his Disciples, when the very Case came before him; except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

But the violent Convulsions of the Earth, that have of late been so frequent, destructive, and alarming, are not the only angry and threatening Symptoms that attend us. The Judgments of God are yet nearer to us. The Sword of War is already unsheathed, and the bloody Banner displayed. Providence has raised us up an Enemy, at whose Arts and Power we have just Cause to be alarmed. One that is ambitious and aspiring; politic, insidious and powerful; that has made *Europe* tremble for her Liberties, and more than once prepared the Yoke, for the freeborn Spirits of this envied Island. The Wisdom of our Governors seems happily to be throwing



throwing the Contest into an Element, where our natural Strength resides. But still let us remember, that the Race is not always to the Swift, nor the Battle to the Strong. Providence can save or destroy by a small Force, as well as by a large one. If our Iniquities are full and the Time of Vengeance is come, our Strength will not avail us. If the Lord be on our Side, let us be in no Pain for the Event, nor fear what Man can do unto us.

It is high time then to take our own Case into serious Consideration, and to see what Grounds it affords either of Hope or of Fear. We have in Time past seen our Days of Adversity and Distress. We have been encompassed with signal Dangers, and been favoured with signal Deliverances. We have mourned and sought the Lord, when the Rod of his Anger has hung over us; and forsaken him again, when it was once removed out of our Sight. A very few Years have passed, since we were delivered from the Evils of a ruinous and destructive War; and fewer still since Nature was convulsed under our Feet, when the Earth trembled and threatened Destruction to this City and Kingdom. And have we profited by these Terrors and providential Warnings? Have we seen the Judgments of God and learned Righteousness? The Case, I am afraid, is far otherwise. It is an unwelcome Task to open my Country's Wounds, and to publish her Dis-

grace.

grace. I shall do it with a gentle and sparing Hand, and leave your own Reflection to supply the Rest. You will allow me to pass over the Insolence and Licentiousness, the dreadful Blasphemies and Profanations, the Intemperance and Excess, that prevail amongst the inferior People; the general Depravity and Corruption of Manners, the Lewdness and Debauchery, the horrid and unnatural Vices, that too visibly abound in this great Mart and Sink of Corruption. But there are two Vices, which I would point out to your particular Observation, because they seem to mark very strongly the Character of this Age and Country; and they are a Contempt of Religion, and a Love of Pleasure. Vices that are very nearly allied, that mutually beget and support each other, and are a fruitful Source of Vice and Corruption of all Kinds.

Whether Infidelity prevails more in the present Generation, than the past, I shall leave to nicer Observers to determine. But if it has not increased in Numbers, sure I am it is grown worse in Principle. The Infidel of the last Age, though he disputed the Truth of the Gospel, was yet a strenuous Assertor of natural Religion in all Points. But the Infidel of these Times not only renounces Christianity, and sports with its most solemn Mysteries, but boldly disclaims the essential Principles of natural Religion. I call the Doctrines of a Providence and a Life to come essential Principles;



ciples; for they have ever passed for such, since Religion, either natural or revealed, has had a Being in the World. This, I am afraid, is growing apace to be the fashionable Infidelity of the present Age. And yet what is it but Atheism, disguised under the softer Name of Deism? To which no Government, that is attentive to its own Safety, would allow even a Toleration?

Amongst the Contemners of Religion, I reckon, not only professed Infidels, but pretended Believers; who profess to believe in God and in Christ, and yet live as if they owed them no Suit or Service; who never enter the House of God, nor approach his holy Table, but for some temporal Purpose; who never put on so much as the Form of Godliness, but to make a Gain of it. Add this Class of Men to the former, and the Account will swell to a melancholy Size indeed.

But a Lust of Pleasure is by far the more general Vice. I know not indeed what Ranks of Men to exclude from a Share of it. Pleasure seems now to be taking Rank amongst the liberal Arts, and young Minds are regularly broke and trained to it. Amongst those who pretend to be of Fashion, it seems to be an essential Part of Education; as if the natural Growth of Idleness and Vanity was not quick enough of itself, but must be cultivated and brought forward by Art. And the Pursuit of Pleasure, in all its Variety and Extent, one would take to be

the proper Business of Life, if one might judge from the unceasing Diligence and Zeal with which Multitudes seek and follow it. It was the Saying of a heathen Emperor, that he had lost a Day, if it afforded no Opportunity of doing Good. But these happy Improvers of Time would reckon such Days only lost, as were not employed in some trifling and fashionable Amusement. But it is needless to enlarge on the Keenneſs of the public Appetite for Pleaſure. It is the Obſervation of every Man, and the ſerious Concern of every wiſe Man and Lover of his Country. But there is a very late Inſtance of it which I obſerved with Grief, and now tell with Shame and Regret. When the Day was now approaching, which had been appointed by Authority, *to humble ourſelves before Almighty God, and to beſeech him to avert his Judgments from us;* and whiſt it behoved every Man to be preparing his Heart, and composing his Mind, for the more ſolemn Performance of this Duty; a public Summons was given to the Sons of Riot, and ten times repeated, to an Entertainment of the moſt ſuſpicious Kind. To which many doubtleſs have gone, and returned with innocent Hearts; but ſtill its very Plan and Conſtitution is evidently licentious. Where, as if to conſult ſome Dead of Darkneſs, every one appears in a borrowed Face and Character; where Shame, the natural Guard of Virtue, is entirely removed; where the Nature of the Entertainment miniſters Temptation, and affords ample Encouragement to Vice and Intrigue.

Wretched



Wretched Infatuation! to open a Scene of such finished Vanity, so likely to pervert the Heart and debauch it, whilst the Judgments of God were sounding in our Ears, and we were moved by all the Powers of Reason, of Religion, and of Government, to beseech God to avert them! The Revocation of this Summons we owe to the Wisdom and Virtue of our Governors, and to the Piety of our gracious Sovereign.

Our own Case then, impartially considered, affords, I am afraid, but small Room for Hope. But still let us not despair. There is one Source of Hope left, to which we may yet apply, and that is the Goodness and Mercy of God. Let us remember, that the Men of *Nineveh* were saved from Destruction, on a general Humiliation and Repentance, though the fatal Decree was passed, and a short Day fixed for Execution. And even *Sodom* itself had been spared, had ten righteous Men been found in the City. Let us not doubt then, but there is Mercy in reserve for us also, if we seek it in Time, and seek it in the Manner we ought. There is one Thing, and one only, that can render us worthy of it, and that is a speedy Reformation and Amendment of Life. It is a stubborn Work to reform a whole People in Principle and Practice, but let each Man resolve to reform himself and the Work is done. But let us remember, that it is a Work which admits of no Delay. The Ensigns of God's Wrath are displayed in many Shapes;

Shapes; his Judgments are round us, and in the Midst of us; and if we neglect it to-day, it may be out of our Power to-morrow. And where can we more fitly date the Era of a new Life, than where God and Man call upon us to date it, this solemn Day of Humiliation, which the Wisdom and Piety of Government have appointed for that Purpose? Then, from a Day of Contrition and Sorrow, it shall become a Day of real and lasting Joy to us and our Posterity.

But then consider farther; that Reformation must not be a transient Act, to pass away and vanish with the gloomy Scene that now surrounds us. For this would be only a more specious Kind of Hypocrisy, and serve to aggravate our Guilt and not remove it. The Foundation must be laid much deeper, to make it, as it ought to be, a durable and standing Work. We must not suffer a Day to open or to close upon us, without refreshing our Hearts and Minds with the Remembrance of it, and strengthening our Resolutions to continue and complete it.

These Measures firmly and resolutely pursued will, we may be confident, bring us within the Reach of God's Mercy, and recommend us to his Aid and Protection. We may then hope that he will remove his Plagues and Terrors from us, and change them into Blessings; that he will go forth with our Fleets and Armies, and bring them



them back crowned with Honour, Victory and Peace; that he will give us to enjoy, in Comfort and Safety, the Milk and the Honey of our fruitful and happy *Canaan*, with all the Blessings of a free, a flourishing and virtuous People; that he will support and strengthen the growing Age, and lengthen the precious Life of our Sovereign, for his own and his Kingdom's Sake, for the Sake of us and our Posterity; that he will impart a full Measure of his Grace to the Princes of his royal House, inspire them with Prudence, Humanity, Wisdom and Magnanimity, and every princely Virtue, that can make them great and happy in themselves, a Blessing to their People, Examples to the Princes of *Europe*, and Ornaments to Mankind.

This flattering Prospect may still be realized, and these Blessings made our own, if moved by the Terrors of the Lord we teach our Hearts Submission to Religion's Dictates, and while his Judgments are in the Earth learn Righteousness.

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